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Opinion / Column

Sudbury ignored developing crisis. Here are some steps to fix it

Addiction, poverty, homelessness and crime now overwhelming the city

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33 Comments

An encampment at Energy Court in Sudbury, Ont. on Monday November 4, 2024. John Lappa/Sudbury Star/Postmedia Network

By Ritchy Dubé

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RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

The Problem: In 1994, I attended city hall to address council about addiction, poverty, homelessness and crime. I asked them to develop an infrastructure for youth because I predicted a drug and crime tsunami was about to slam into our beloved Rock City.

I was concerned and for good reason. After all, one didn't have to be a rocket scientist to see that the tsunami that was swallowing up large swaths of people down south and was surging North with deadly intent.

Then bam – it hit like a meteor. It became Sudbury's second meteor explosion, except this one did not leave us with lodes of precious minerals. No, this one created devastation, destruction and destitution, marked with rows of white crosses.

At the same time, I visited secondary schools and school boards, trying to convince them to institute an addiction curriculum. I was met with cynicism and told ion and politicians did nothing. What a gut punch.

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My point: We missed the opportunity to confront this crisis. Now we are in over our heads. We are overwhelmed and confused, and our response is to grab them by the shirt fronts, if they are lucky enough to have a shirt, and toss their butts in jail, hoping that forced treatment will do the trick. Sounds a tad desperate, doesn't it?

While I don't have all the answers to the poverty, homelessness, mental health, addiction and crime that plague our city, I believe we can do better. Here are a few ideas we can implement right now.

Quick fixes:

Education. Teach youth about addiction, crime and punishment early in life. Be kind to kids at school – be a positive role model.

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Social welfare. Don't toss kids in reform schools or foste e.

Income. Give enough money for rent, food and clothes.

Rent. Pay landlords directly.

Personal. Give folks food and clothes Advocate for the solutions I propose. Don't toss people in jail for being poor, disabled, addicted and lost. Be compassionate, kind, gentle and caring.

Choice.: I choose my response. I choose where to be mean and petty and where I choose to be patient, caring and understanding. You do, too.

I get it. Like many of you, I too get annoyed, critical and intolerant in spite of what I know. After all, I was addicted, homeless and a criminal for a long time – maybe 10 years of my life, from age 14 to 20. I was lost and misled and ignorant for a good chunk of my life.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

It wasn't until I reached 27 years old that I sobered up and made several decisions to lead a good honest, hardworking life with a solid ethical and moral code.

Look, to get back to my choices. Just the other day, I toc the pooch decided to roll in human excrement left by those t? I understand these feelings. They are natural and normal.

Luckily, it is also quite natural for me to be ambivalent, ld equally strong thoughts, beliefs ar feelings about the same thing. This would be my kind, d , compassionate and understanding The side that says why put victims of poverty, mental he addictions and hunger in prison?

Yeah, I choose to be kind and tolerant, trying to understand, without being so mean, cruel and intolerant. It isn't easy but we do have a choice by changing social, economic and political laws, regulations and

to advocate for a fairer society. After all, we are in this together. Respectfully, always.

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